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ON THE OCCURRENCE OF *GIBBULA* (*STEROMPHALA*)
CINERARIA (L.) (TROCHIDAE) IN THE MALTESE
ISLANDS

Abstract

Two living specimens of *Gibbula cineraria* (L.) have been collected from an experimental bivalve culture farm at Mistra Bay, Malta on the 26th March 1976. It is suggested that these *G. cineraria* were accidentally transported to Malta with oyster spat imported for the farm.

Riassunto

Due esemplari vivi di *Gibbula cineraria* (L.) sono stati rinvenuti in una località adibita ad allevamento sperimentale di mitili, nella baia di Mistra a Malta il 26 Marzo dell'anno 1976. Si suppone che il ritrovamento di *G. cineraria* si possa attribuire alla presenza accidentale della specie già insediata tra le giovani ostriche importate a Malta per cultura.

Gibbula cineraria (L.) is a common East Atlantic trochid which is found on rocky substrata and on the fronds of laminarians in the medio-littoral and infralittoral zones. Its geographical range extends from Norway down to Gibraltar (NORDSIECK, 1968; GHISOTTI & MELONE, 1972). In the Mediterranean it occurs only in the extreme west along the Spanish coast where it penetrates through the Strait of Gibraltar. It has also been recorded doubtfully from the Black Sea by NORDSIECK (1968) and equally doubtfully from the Alboran Sea by GHISOTTI & MELONE (1972).

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Two living specimens, corresponding in every detail to *G. cineraria* have been collected from Malta and this constitutes the first Central Mediterranean record for this species. The two specimens were collected from a depth of 3 m from Mistra Bay, Malta on the 26th March 1976 and were found in an area which at the time was serving as an experimental bivalve culture farm, and indeed, both specimens were taken from the floating cages containing oysters. A description of the Mistra Bay site and its hydrography has been given by AGIUS *et al.* (1978). The two specimens had the following dimensions:

	h	D
specimen 1	9.20 mm	12.15 mm
specimen 2	14.80 mm	15.59 mm

The specimens are deposited in the author's collection.

The origin of the Maltese specimens of *G. cineraria* is intriguing. It does not seem likely that there are indigenous populations of *G. cineraria* in Malta or the surrounding coasts, otherwise, given the years of diligent collecting by many malacologists, these would have been reported sooner. The most likely explanation is that the species was introduced into Malta with the oyster spat imported for the bivalve culture project at Mistra. The fact that both specimens were actually collected from the culture cages holding the spat gives further weight to this theory.

Three species of bivalve have been cultured at Mistra at various times: *Mytilus galloprovincialis*, *Ostrea edulis* and *Crassostrea gigas*. Spat of these last two species were imported from Anglesey, Wales (AGIUS *et al.*, 1978) where *G. cineraria* is common, and this may well be the place of origin of the Maltese specimens.

Whether a breeding population of *G. cineraria* has been established at Mistra or not, only future collecting will tell. To date, no further specimens of this species have been collected from Malta.

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